

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **MEPPERSHALL CofE VA LOWER SCHOOL**

Meppershall, Shefford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109620

Headteacher: Mrs L Murray

Lead inspector: Mr J Earish

Dates of inspection: 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> March 2005

Inspection number: 270813

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: First school  
School category: Voluntary aided  
Age range of pupils: 5 to 9 years  
Gender of pupils: Mixed  
Number on roll: 94

School address: 107 High Street  
Meppershall  
Shefford  
Bedfordshire  
Postcode: SG17 5LZ

Telephone number: 01462 813293  
Fax number:

Appropriate authority: The governing body  
Name of chair of Mrs M Evesham  
governors:

Date of previous 31<sup>st</sup> January 2000  
inspection:

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Meppershall C of E (VA) Lower School is a small village school near Shefford in rural Bedfordshire where socio-economic factors are favourable. However, the school's intake reflects the full range of social circumstances. It is smaller than the majority of other primary schools nationally. There are 94 boys and girls on roll aged 4 to 9 years. Pupils come mainly from Meppershall and the surrounding villages. The number of pupils joining the school is increasing as the village expands. Just over six per cent of pupils are identified as having special educational needs. This proportion is below the national average. The range of pupils' needs includes severe learning disabilities, autism, visual impairment, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Only one pupil has a statement of special educational need, which is below the national average. At five per cent, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Very few pupils come from ethnic minorities, and all pupils have English as their first language. Attainment on entry to the school varies from year to year but is now average overall, although each year group has a different proportion of higher and lower attaining pupils. Most children have attended a playgroup before starting school. At the time of the inspection, ten pupils were in the Foundation Stage.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2321 6	J Earish	<i>Lead inspector</i>	Science; Information and communication technology; Physical education.
1937 4	W Sheehan	<i>Lay inspector</i>	
3216 8	A Keen	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; English; Special educational needs; Geography; History.
2265 7	M Madeley	<i>Team inspector</i>	Foundation Stage curriculum; Art; Design and technology; Music.

The inspection contractor was:

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## **REPORT CONTENTS**

	<b>Page</b>
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS</b>	<b>3</b>
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>5</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>19</b>

## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

#### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Meppershall Lower School is a good school, which provides a good standard of education** for its pupils. Standards are above average in reading, writing, mathematics and science. The quality of teaching is good, and all groups of pupils achieve well. The school provides good value for money.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are above what are expected in English, mathematics and science.
- The headteacher provides good leadership, and all adults work effectively as a team.
- Teaching is of good quality, and pupils of all abilities achieve well.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good throughout the school.
- Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are given good quality help in lessons and achieve well.
- The accommodation is unsatisfactory.
- The opportunities for structured play for children in the Foundation Stage need to be improved.
- Subject co-ordinators need more opportunities to monitor their areas of responsibility.

The school has made good progress since its last inspection. Overall, the key issues for improvement from 2000 have been effectively addressed. Standards have improved, and the school received a School Achievement Award in 2003 for its commitment to basic skills. There are now schemes of work for all subjects. Teachers now have responsibilities for subjects, and systems for monitoring and evaluation have been developed. More time has been given to science and information and communication technology (ICT), and there are more extra-curricular clubs and activities. However, co-ordinators need more opportunities to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their areas of responsibility. The school's self-evaluation is largely accurate, and this issue has already been identified as an area for improvement.

#### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

In 2004, the standards achieved by pupils aged seven were well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. When compared with those of similar schools, standards were well above average in mathematics and above average in reading and writing.

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 2, compared with:	All schools			Similar schools
	2002	2003	2004	2004
Reading	C	B	A	B
Writing	A	C	A	B
Mathematics	D	B	A	A

*Key: A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average.  
Similar schools are those with similar percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals.*

**Pupils achieve well overall.** Children join the school with a wide range of capabilities, ranging from well below to above average. Although there are many able pupils, pupils overall are of average ability when they join the school. Inspection evidence shows that children in the Reception year achieve well. The majority reach the Early Learning Goals that children are expected to attain by the start of Year 1 and exceed them in language and literacy, mathematics, and knowledge and understanding of the world. Standards of work in Years 2 and 4 are above average in reading and writing, mathematics and science. Standards in ICT are satisfactory overall. In addition, the quality of pupils' singing is outstanding, and most of the pupils are able to play an instrument. Overall, pupils' **personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good.** Their attitudes towards learning and their behaviour are also very good. Attendance is very good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The school provides a good quality of education for its pupils. Teaching is good** in all year groups. Teachers are very good at ensuring that all pupils are included in lessons; they manage pupils' behaviour very well, have high expectation of work, and make good use of the teaching assistants who work alongside them in class. As a result, pupils' learning is good. Teachers know their children very well and use this knowledge to design tasks that are challenging for all ability groups. Higher attaining pupils have challenging tasks set for them in all classes. However, assessment is only satisfactory overall, since many of the procedures rely on informal communication between teachers. This is becoming increasingly difficult to manage as the school gets bigger. A system of learning targets is being introduced to help individual pupils improve, but it is not yet consistent across all subjects. Overall, the curriculum is good. It has the required breadth and balance and is enriched by a good range of additional activities. However, the accommodation is unsatisfactory. There is no separate designated area for outdoor play for children in the Foundation Stage, and opportunities for structured play could be improved. The headteacher does not have an office, and there is insufficient space for staff to prepare their lessons. Pupils have limited access to the library for research and reading. The school provides well for the care, welfare and safety of its pupils. Links with parents, the community and other schools are good.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**The leadership and management of the school are good overall.** The leadership provided by the headteacher is good, but some co-ordinators do not have enough opportunities to monitor the provision and the standards in their areas of responsibility rigorously enough. Governors are supportive of the school and have a clear appreciation of what the school does well and of where improvements could be made. The quality of the governors' work is good. All members of the school community work extremely well as a team and are committed to school improvement. Legal requirements are met.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Most parents expressed positive views about the school. They particularly like the quality of teaching, the way children are treated, and the good progress they make. Pupils say they enjoy their lessons and feel safe and secure.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

**The most important things the school should do to improve are:**

- Provide more opportunities for subject co-ordinators to monitor their areas of responsibility.
- Improve the accommodation to provide a designated outdoor play area for children in the Foundation Stage, access to a stimulating library for research and reading, a headteacher's office, and sufficient space where staff can prepare lessons.
- Improve the quality of structured play for children in the Foundation Stage.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' overall **achievement is good**. Children join the school with a wide range of capabilities, from well below to above average. Although there are many able pupils, pupils overall are of average ability when they join the school. Boys and girls generally achieve equally well, and pupils with SEN achieve well in all age groups. By the end of Years 2 and 4, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. All pupils, including the higher attainers, are well challenged and make good progress.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching throughout the school is good, and pupils of all abilities achieve well.
- Standards are above average in English, mathematics, and science at age 7 and 9 years.
- Music is a particular strength of the school.

#### Commentary

1. The school's commitment to educational inclusion, and to promoting equality in all that it does, is a key factor in pupils' good achievement. It caters well for pupils whatever their backgrounds, gender or ethnicity. Teachers group children and pupils carefully, varying the activities and choosing the most appropriate methods. Lessons are planned so that work is well matched to pupils' differing abilities. These features, together with teachers' enthusiasm and pupils' very good attitudes to learning and very good behaviour, make a significant contribution to pupils' good achievement.

2. It is difficult to make an overall judgement about attainment on entry to the school when this is based on small numbers of children. Children start school at the beginning of each term and there are currently ten children in the Reception class. Although there are many able pupils, the ability of pupils when taken overall is broadly in line with national expectations for this age group.

3. Inspection evidence shows that children in the Reception year achieve well. The majority reach the Early Learning Goals which children are expected to attain by the start of Year 1, and they exceed them in language and literacy, mathematics, and knowledge and understanding of the world. Space in the Foundation Stage classroom is at a premium, and there is no separate dedicated outdoor learning area. This limits the range of activities that take place at certain times of the day. Children have fewer opportunities for structured play and to move freely in different ways.

4. The table below shows the average point scores attained in the Year 2 tests in 2004. One point represents about one term's progress, so the table shows, for example, that last year's pupils were on average around two terms ahead of all pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

#### *Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 – average point scores in 2004*

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	17.6 (16.9)	15.8 (15.7)
writing	16.3 (15.0)	14.6 (14.6)

mathematics	18.3 (17.3)	16.2 (16.3)
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*There were 24 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

5. Standards achieved in the national tests in 2004 for pupils aged seven were well above the national average in reading, above average in writing, and average in mathematics. When compared with those of schools in a similar context, standards are broadly similar. Conclusions from these results may not be reliable, since the group of pupils assessed is small and a considerable percentage change can result from a movement of one level by one pupil. Similarly, an analysis of trends over the past four years shows considerable variations. This is because the year-on-year differences in the attainment of small numbers of pupils are magnified when each individual pupil represents a large proportion of the total. However, these are much better results than for the previous two years, and considerably better than those achieved in the national tests immediately after the last inspection.

6. Inspection evidence shows that pupils in the present Year 2 are above average in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and mathematics, and all groups of pupils are achieving well. A recent initiative to raise standards in writing has been successful, so that standards are much better than in 2003. There are no national tests in science in Year 2, but inspection evidence shows standards as being above average. By the time pupils transfer to middle schools at the end of Year 4, standards are above what is expected for pupils of a similar age in English, mathematics and science, and all groups are achieving well. This is a significant accomplishment, as three of the higher attaining pupils have left this small cohort since the end of Year 2. Overall, this represents a significant improvement since the last inspection, when standards were satisfactory in Year 2 and Year 4 and progress was satisfactory overall.

7. Pupils with SEN are well provided for, and achieve as well as their peers. Those with individual education plans (IEPs) are helped to achieve their targets and work towards acceptable standards of behaviour. The learning support assistants are effective in supporting pupils during lessons, and helping them to participate fully in all class activities.

8. Inspectors were unable to conduct a detailed inspection of all the areas of the curriculum in the time available, although all subjects were at least sampled. However, provision for the music is a particular strength of the school. Pupils of all ages co-operate very well and sing together to a very good standard. In addition, all pupils have the opportunity to learn to play the recorder, and the majority are able to sight read notes on the treble stave. This not only supports the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, but also provides many opportunities for pupils to perform in public.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Their personal development is also very good, resulting in the creation of a very positive ethos for learning. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall. Attendance and punctuality are very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are very good overall, and the school creates a very effective learning environment.
- Pupils develop very good personal and social skills.
- The attendance rate was very high in comparison with that of all primary schools in 2003-04.

### **Commentary**

9. Behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is very good, and pupils are very keen to work hard and to learn. These are all factors that contribute to their good

achievement. In class, pupils listen very well and show very good levels of interest, concentration and determination to complete the tasks set for them. They support each other very well in paired and group work, and are very keen to respond to questions and to take part in discussions. Pupils who have SEN are given very good support; they feel confident and so have very good attitudes to their work.

10. Pupils' behaviour is very good throughout the school day, and playtimes are friendly, social occasions. Most parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that behaviour was good. The school was using county guidelines for managing bullying, but has now formally adopted its own anti-bullying policy. There have been no exclusions in recent years. The very good attitudes and behaviour ensure that pupils are able to learn in a positive atmosphere with a minimum of fuss or disruption.

11. Pupils' very good opportunities for reflection in assemblies, and during lessons, make important contributions to their spiritual development, self-awareness and self-esteem. For example, in a Year 4 art lesson pupils valued and respected one another's work, and sensitively offered each other advice and support on how they could improve. Pupils also have a very good understanding of the difference between right and wrong, and a very clear appreciation of the impact their behaviour has on others. Social skills are developed very effectively so that relationships are very good, and pupils are polite, helpful and sensitive towards adults and each other. Pupils have a good appreciation of their own and other cultural traditions, particularly through their work in art and music. Local artists, and visits by theatre companies and musicians, support pupils' cultural development well. There are also numerous opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility around the school to promote their independence, which they do cheerfully and with pride.

12. The high attendance rate at the school confirms that pupils enjoy coming to school. All pupils have very good attendance. However, a third of the authorised absences are due to parents taking pupils out of school for holidays during term time. The school is constantly monitoring the situation to minimise the effect on pupils' learning. The school operates an informal start to the day, and the overwhelming majority of pupils arrive before the official start time. These arrangements provide good opportunities for parents and teachers to meet informally and to discuss any concerns.

**Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	96.8	School data	0.1
National data	94.5	National data	0.4

*The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.*

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education is **good**. Good teaching enables all pupils to make significant gains in their learning and to **achieve well**. The curriculum is good and meets pupils' needs, as well as providing enrichment through extra-curricular activities. The school cares well for its pupils, and links with other schools and the community are good.

**Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are good overall. Assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers have high expectations of standards and behaviour.

- Teachers use questioning very well to extend pupils' understanding.
- Pupils work hard, enjoy their work and have pride in what they achieve.
- Individual learning targets are helping pupils to improve, but this practice is not yet consistent across all subjects.

## Commentary

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 18 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	5	8	5	0	0	0

*The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.*

13. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers know and understand well what needs to be taught. They plan and deliver interesting lessons, and vary their teaching to take account of the different ways in which pupils learn. The quality of pupils' learning is good overall. They enjoy their learning, confidently ask questions, are keen to talk about what they are doing, and can work both independently and collaboratively.

14. Throughout the school, teachers are very good at including all pupils in lessons. Teachers manage their pupils very well and relate very well to them. As a result, pupils' behaviour during lessons is exemplary, and they have very good attitudes towards their work. Pupils respond well to their teachers' high expectations of behaviour, settle quickly to their tasks and work enthusiastically. The positive atmosphere for learning enables teachers to work with individuals or groups with the minimum of fuss and disturbance, while the remainder get on with their work.

15. The good quality help provided by teaching assistants (TAs) is an important factor in the successful teaching and learning of pupils who are identified as having SEN. In all lessons observed, when TAs were present, the pupils working with them maintained concentration and learned successfully in whole-class, small-group and individual tasks. Teaching assistants know pupils well, are well aware of their own roles in the classroom, and help lessons to run smoothly.

16. Assessment is satisfactory overall. Teachers know their children very well, and use this knowledge to plan tasks that are well matched to pupils' different abilities. However, many of these procedures rely on informal communication between teachers. This is becoming increasingly difficult to manage as the school numbers increase. Targets are set for different ability groups and are reviewed regularly; good use is also made of optional national tests. The results are used to identify areas of strength and weakness, and to address any underachievement. Assessment in the non-core subjects is satisfactory in that the requirement for teachers to make an annual 'best fit' judgement about pupils' attainment is met. However, assessment in some of these subjects focuses too much on coverage of topics rather than on how well pupils acquire skills.

17. A system of learning targets is being introduced to help individual pupils improve, though it is not yet consistent across all subjects. For example, literacy targets have been successfully introduced with the effect of driving up achievement for all groups of pupils. In order that they should have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve in science, a system is being piloted in Year 3 whereby pupils can evaluate their own success in the skills of scientific enquiry, as well as those in scientific knowledge and understanding.

### The curriculum

The school provides a **good** curriculum. The accommodation is unsatisfactory.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good opportunities for experimentation and investigation in science.
- Within the curriculum there are very good opportunities for pupils to develop their personal and social skills.

- Provision for art and music is good, and has a positive effect on pupils' social, spiritual and cultural development.
- The accommodation is inadequate to support all areas of the pupils' learning, and hinders the running of the school day.
- Provision for pupils with SEN is good.

## **Commentary**

18. The school ensures that pupils have full access to the national curriculum, and also provides them with a broad range of extra-curricular activities. The planning and teaching of subjects is now firmly based on nationally recommended guidance, and pupils are very well prepared for the next stages in their education. Whole-school projects are carefully planned to encourage learning, and the good links that exist between subjects add considerably to the quality of pupils' learning. In their planning, teachers recognise the different levels of attainment within their classes and plan accordingly so that all needs are met. Pupils also have opportunities to experience a wide range of sporting, artistic, and musical activities. They are organised at lunchtimes and after school by staff, parents and other members of the community.

19. The very good provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) contributes to the pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour, and prepares them well for adult life. Pupils are encouraged to work co-operatively and to be involved in discussions. They are successfully learning to share with each other and feel able to express their own opinions. Pupils with SEN are supported well through clear programmes designed for their individual needs.

20. A particularly effective element of the curriculum is the emphasis placed on investigations and experimentation in science. This captures pupils' enthusiasm and natural curiosity, and successfully develops their skills of scientific enquiry. Music is also a strong feature of the school's provision, and pupils sing very well. All the pupils are able to learn the recorder and are successfully taught to recognise musical notation. In addition, the attractive displays of pupils' work show that they experience and enjoy a very wide range of media, and practise a number of different techniques. This makes a valuable contribution to pupils' cultural development, and to their appreciation of the expressive arts.

21. The accommodation is limited, despite the recent building work. The hall is small, and the library is used for a variety of activities, making it often unavailable for research and study. The headteacher does not have an office, and staff lack an area for lesson preparation. Space in the Foundation Stage classroom is at a premium, and there is no separate dedicated outdoor learning area. This inevitably limits the range of activities, and children have fewer chances for structured play and the opportunity to move freely.

## **Care, guidance and support**

Procedures to ensure that pupils work in a safe environment are good. Good levels of support, advice and guidance help pupils to access the necessary support they require. Satisfactory processes are in place to seek and act on pupils' views.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good relationships between adults and children ensure that all pupils are cared for and supported very effectively, and they know that their opinions are valued.
- Pupils with SEN are well supported.

- The school's procedures for health, safety and child protection are good, and ensure that pupils work in a safe and secure environment.
- Pupils are set clear targets for improvement in writing, which helps them to make progress; in other subject guidance is less formalised.

## **Commentary**

22. All adults in the school contribute to a very friendly and supportive atmosphere in which pupils flourish both personally and in their work. They are very good role models for pupils, and this leads to a purposeful learning environment. Throughout the school, pupils are friendly and supportive of each other, and have the confidence to ask questions and raise issues. Pupils' views are carefully considered in lessons, but unfortunately there are no systems in place to seek their views, for example through a school council or with questionnaires.

23. Procedures for the identification and assessment of pupils with SEN are good, and enable the school to identify those pupils who need extra support at an early stage.

24. The school ensures that regular health and safety checks are carried out, and the governing body is involved in supporting these arrangements. Good procedures, including risk assessments, are securely in place to promote a safe learning environment. Child protection procedures are well established, and the school, through discussions with staff, is diligent in consistently monitoring the welfare of its pupils.

25. The school's satisfactory and improving assessment procedures are used as a basis on which to guide pupils in their learning. Day-to-day marking is of variable quality, although oral discussions with individual pupils on how to improve their work are often good. Target setting for pupils is developing well, and a good start has been made through the introduction of writing targets. Individual targets to help pupils improve in other areas of learning are inconsistent across the school. Pupils' personal development is predominantly monitored informally by staff who know pupils very well, and who react quickly to any changes in their daily well-being.

26. The school's provision for pupils' care, guidance and support has improved steadily since the previous inspection. Good levels of care are central to the school's ethos, and are a major factor in the pupils feeling secure and valued.

## **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

The school's partnership with parents is good. Links with other schools and the community are also good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents' views of the school and their level of involvement are favourable.
- Links with the local community and with the middle schools are good.
- Parents are well informed about school activities and their children's progress, but not enough information about the curriculum is provided for parents.
- The school has yet to formally establish ways of seeking parents' views.

27. Views collected through the meeting with parents and the parents' questionnaires show that they are pleased with most aspects of the school. The headteacher and teachers are available at the start and end of the school day, and parents appreciate these opportunities to chat informally and to raise any issues or concerns. This daily contact with most parents promotes good and friendly two-way communication. However, a small number of parents would like more formal opportunities to discuss their children's progress. An active and hard working Parent Teacher Association supports the school and raises

funds to provide it with additional resources, such as funding for the upkeep of the small outdoor learner swimming pool which pupils enjoy in the summer.

28. The school has developed good links with the local community, including the local church. The school uses the local environment to support pupils' learning, for example through visits to the neighbouring bakery and a community nature reserve. Barnfield College uses the school for local community computer courses. However, links with the wider international community have yet to be developed. Very good links exist with the main middle schools to which pupils transfer, and various school cluster meetings ensure that curriculum continuity is enhanced and maintained.

29. The school provides parents with information of good quality. The well-written prospectus gives clear and helpful information. Newsletters are sent out regularly and provide useful information on events and activities. However, some parents would like to receive more information about policies and the curriculum. In the past, the school has organised information evenings about areas of the curriculum, but they were poorly attended. Pupils' annual reports include appropriately detailed information about their progress, and targets for improvement. Regular opportunities are offered for parents to discuss their children's progress, and all parents attend, which reflects their keenness to be involved in their children's education.

30. Strong links with parents have been maintained since the school was last inspected, and are a significant element in their support for the children's learning. Parents hold the school in high regard, as is clear from the fact that some choose this school instead of schools nearer to their homes. The school is in a good position to develop these links further, especially with regard to providing more detailed curriculum information to those parents requesting it.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Overall, the quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher's leadership is good. Governance is also good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher's good leadership has brought about key improvements needed to help raise standards and overall attainment.
- Governors monitor the school's work, and are involved in agreeing policies and helping to establish the future direction of the school.
- Co-ordinators do not have sufficient opportunities to monitor rigorously the provision and standards in their areas of responsibility.

### **Commentary**

31. The headteacher provides good leadership. She knows the pupils and their families very well, and is always available to parents. The effect of this good leadership can be seen in her commitment to promoting high standards and the fullest personal development of all learners in all aspects of the school's work. Under her leadership, standards have significantly improved since the last inspection, and the curriculum now has good links between subjects, which adds considerably to the quality of pupils' learning. The headteacher's clear commitment to promoting pupils' personal and social skills, and the inclusion of all pupils, contributes strongly to the school's very good ethos. The management of work with pupils who have SEN is also good. The school has good links with parents and the community, and close links with other schools. However, one major weakness is that some subject co-ordinators do not have enough opportunities to monitor thoroughly the provision and the standards in their areas of responsibility. This has already been identified by the school as the next stage in its development.

32. There is good subject leadership in English, mathematics and science because the co-ordinators have high expectations of themselves, their colleagues and the pupils, and they work well together as a team. However, the leadership of other subjects is less well developed because

teachers do not have enough opportunities to monitor with sufficient rigour their areas of responsibility. Improvement plans accurately reflect the school's needs, but a more effective match between monitoring of provision and the outcome of children's learning would give co-ordinators an even better picture of the further improvements that could be made.

33. The finances are well managed. The school faces the challenge of a tight budget resulting from fluctuations in pupil numbers and an increasing need to provide for pupils with SEN. The carry forward figure is within nationally recommended guidelines. Governors provide good support and are extending their engagement in assessing the impact of curriculum initiatives.

### Financial information

#### *Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004*

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	271,628.00	Balance from previous year	8,683.00
Total expenditure	268,946.00	Balance carried forward to the next	13,508.00
Expenditure per pupil	2,892.00		

34. Governors are aware of the limitations of the school buildings, especially the impact of the lack of space on the teaching of some aspects of the curriculum. They have, in the recent past, managed to extend the school buildings. However, the numbers of pupils joining the school are increasing as the village grows rapidly, and governors are re-evaluating the accommodation to see if it meets the needs of an expanding community.

35. The day-to-day administration of the school is efficient. It ensures that teachers are able to focus on their professional duties and are not diverted from their work by administrative tasks. The secretary deals competently with queries, and contributes strongly to the smooth running of the school.

## **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

### **AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE**

The quality of provision is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children make good progress in reading, writing and number work.
- Topic work is well planned to extend children's knowledge of the world.
- Teachers have high expectations of good behaviour, and relationships are very good.
- Children's play is not well structured, and the lack of space restricts children's learning.
- The lack of space restricts children's physical development.

#### **Commentary**

36. Attainment on entry is broadly average. Children join the school at the beginning of the term in which their fifth birthday falls. This year, nearly half the children will join the class during the summer term. Inspection evidence shows that children in the Reception year achieve well. The majority reach the Early Learning Goals that children are expected to attain by the start of Year 1, and exceed them in language and literacy, mathematics and knowledge and understanding of the world.

37. A wide range of evidence indicates that the quality of teaching is good overall, though insufficient space inhibits some opportunities. Closely focused teaching of reading, writing, number and topic work helps children make good progress in all of these aspects. Children are frequently challenged, for instance in writing and counting, and most meet the staff's high expectations of their behaviour. However, teaching is sometimes only satisfactory because lack of space reduces the teacher's chances to develop children's abilities through structured play. Children with SEN are well supported, often on an individual basis. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The co-ordinator for the Foundation Stage works very closely with the teaching assistants (TA), and both provide good models for the children.

38. Children's achievement in **personal, social and emotional development** is satisfactory. Staff have high expectations of work and behaviour, and children learn what is right and what is wrong from an early stage. They are interested in the activities that are organised for them, and willingly choose what they want to do. Teaching is of a satisfactory quality, rather than good, because play is not structured well enough, and children often choose the same activities. The lack of space restricts opportunities for structured play in permanent role-play areas, for example in the use of sand, paint or toys. This inhibits the children's independence when using resources. Staff form very good relationships with the children, which helps develop children's self-confidence and independence.

39. Provision for **communication, language and literacy is good**. Children exceed the Early Learning Goals for communication, language and literacy and achieve well. Teaching is of good quality. Most children speak clearly, using phrases and short

sentences to communicate their ideas and needs, and a few can vary their words according to who is listening. However, there are fewer structured opportunities to talk about imaginary things. Children know how to hold a book and turn the pages, and they understand how it is organised and the direction that print takes in English. The most able read simple texts and talk about the story, using pictures as references. The least able use the pictures to help them identify the meaning of difficult words. Most children can write their name using recognisable letters, and the most able can successfully write short sentences.

40. Provision for **mathematical development is good**. Children exceed the Early Learning Goals for mathematical development and achieve well. Teaching is of good quality. Children recognise the numerals from 0 to 9 and can count to 10. More able children work with numbers to 20 and beyond. The best learning occurs when children are involved in practical mathematical activities, which capture their imagination and enthusiasm. For example, children were very animated and concentrated for a long period of time when designing coloured patterns for a quilt. They worked well together as a team, selecting the coloured squares and carefully sticking them together. However, this is difficult to organise, since space is limited and groups often have to work in the hall or library.

41. Provision for **knowledge and understanding of the world is good**. Children exceed the Early Learning Goals and achieve well because topics are well planned. Teaching is of good quality. Children experience a range of practical activities, and when making bread and melting chocolate, for instance, they understand that ingredients change when heated. They are able to classify materials by their properties, for example when sorting a range of material used for house building. These successfully develop children's knowledge of the natural world. Children are learning about Christian festivals and have a good understanding of their own culture. Aspects of other cultures are less prominent in their learning.

42. Provision for **physical development is satisfactory**. The majority of children reach the Early Learning Goals for physical development and achieve satisfactorily. Space is at a premium in the classroom and in the small hall. In addition, there is no separate dedicated outdoor area where children can move freely and in different ways. Teaching is of satisfactory quality. Staff work hard to overcome the limitations of the building. For example, a good dance session in the small hall allowed children to move confidently and expressively to music. Children are given opportunities during the school day to use paintbrushes, pencils, scissors and crayons to develop their fine motor skills. They hold tools and writing implements well and with improving accuracy because they get a lot of guided practice.

43. Provision for **creative development is satisfactory**. The majority of children reach the Early Learning Goals for creative development and achieve satisfactorily. Teaching is of satisfactory quality. Children enjoy singing and enthusiastically join in with hymns during the daily assembly. They have good opportunities to draw and paint their own pictures, and excitedly chat about playing in the autumn leaves or listening for sounds around the school. However, many of the creative activities are adult-led, which restricts the opportunities for children to express their own thoughts and feelings.

## **SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 AND 2**

Provision in English is **good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils' attainment across the school is tracked carefully to monitor progress in writing and reading. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are not so closely monitored.
- Individual targets are set for pupils in order to raise standards.
- Standards in reading and writing have been raised.
- Opportunities are used effectively to teach English through other subjects.
- Pupils with SEN achieve well.
- The quality of teaching across the whole school is not monitored sufficiently well.

## **Commentary**

44. The standard of English by the end of Year 2 and by the end of Year 4 is good. Pupils are taught effectively throughout the school; they progress well and their achievement is good. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made to both teaching and learning, and these have resulted in improved standards, especially in reading and writing.

45. By the end of Year 2, pupils enjoy reading and read regularly to adults both at home and in school. They understand the meaning of texts and can express opinions. Lessons are well planned, and pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn. Pupils' writing is imaginative, and they write confidently, often spelling complex words correctly. They learn to distinguish between the past tense and the present tense accurately. Tasks are adapted to make them relevant and capture pupils' interest, such as writing about 'Meppershall Travel'. Targets are set for individual children, enabling them to know what they need to improve, and outlining the next steps in their learning. Pupils listen well in lessons, are given good opportunities to speak in class, and are eager to express their own ideas and opinions.

46. By the end of Year 4, pupils produce good quality written work in a wide variety of styles. They work enthusiastically and are keen to discuss their work, which they are capable of doing very accurately. For example, when writing a fantasy story, pupils in Year 4 were able to work co-operatively, express their ideas imaginatively and develop a variety of styles of writing, showing an awareness of the impact on the reader. Their love of books and reading is growing; they read confidently and appreciate how stories are developed.

47. Leadership of the subject is good. The school has been successful at identifying ways to raise standards, and has worked very hard to achieve this objective. All staff have worked very well together as a team with a common purpose in mind. This has resulted in improved standards, especially the quality of children's writing. Although teachers track pupils' progress, systems for monitoring the quality of teaching are not as well developed. A more effective match between monitoring teaching and the outcome of children's learning in all aspects of English would give the school an even better picture of the further improvements that could be made. This also applies to pupils' speaking and listening skills. Pupils with SEN are monitored very closely. They are supported effectively in lessons and achieve as well as they can.

## **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

48. Using other subjects to support the pupils' learning in language and literacy is a particularly strong feature of the school. Teachers plan interesting and imaginative activities to enhance the use of language and literacy; as a result, pupils realise and appreciate its relevance. The presentation of children's work is often very good; they have folders of work of which they can be proud. They use computers to edit their work, and produce good written descriptions in history and geography.

## **MATHEMATICS**

The quality of provision is **good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve well because of consistently good teaching.

- More able pupils have very good recall of number facts.
- Computers are not used often enough to help pupils learn.
- Pupils often use their numeracy skills in science.

## Commentary

49. In the 2004 national tests, Year 2 pupils achieved scores which were well above the national average when compared both to all schools nationally and to those schools in similar contexts. These high scores were achieved because more than half the pupils achieved the higher Level 3. Results have been rising steadily over the last five years.

50. Pupils' attainment in Years 2 and 4 is above the national average. Pupils in Year 2 are achieving well. Most have a good recall of number bonds within 20 and a good understanding of tallying and interpreting block graphs. More able pupils achieve especially well because teachers frequently set them tasks which challenge their thinking. Pupils in Year 4 are also achieving well and are attaining above average standards. This is a significant achievement, because three of the higher attaining pupils who achieved above average standards when there were in Year 2 have left the school. Pupils with SEN achieve well because their tasks are within their capabilities and they receive additional support from classroom assistants.

51. Teaching and learning are good. Pupils have very positive attitudes towards mathematics because teachers make the lessons interesting and lively. Work is set which challenges pupils at their own level, and they are encouraged to work hard. Teachers ensure that the classroom is a place in which everyone can learn. For example, the mental arithmetic activity at the start of a Year 2 lesson involved all the pupils, extending their understanding of doubling and halving and giving everyone a chance to answer. Pupils in Year 4 use computer programs well to test their knowledge of mathematics, but this practice is less well developed in other classes. Teachers mark pupils' work and praise their efforts. However, there are very few comments which help them to improve their work, and a system of individual learning targets for each pupil has yet to be put in place.

52. Leadership is good because staff work well together as a team and the co-ordinator has high expectations of herself, her colleagues and the pupils. Management is satisfactory. Whilst the co-ordinator has an overview of the subject, she has not formally monitored teachers' planning or pupils' work. There has been good improvement since the last inspection; as a result, standards have improved considerably from those achieved in the national tests immediately after the last inspection.

### Numeracy across the curriculum

53. Pupils' use of their numeracy skills in other subjects is satisfactory. It is particularly good in science, where pupils collect data, draw graphs of various kinds and interpret them skilfully. It is less well developed in other subjects. They practise measuring carefully and accurately in science and design and technology. Data handling skills are well developed in ICT and science, where pupils use tables and graphs to present information. However, the school has yet to undertake an audit of the numeracy skills required in other subjects.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are good by the end of Year 2 and Year 4.

- The science curriculum is good and places a strong emphasis on investigational and experimental science.
- Pupils are very enthusiastic about science, are inquisitive, and achieve well.

## **Commentary**

54. The emphasis that the co-ordinator places on practical and investigative tasks is a key factor leading to the good standards achieved by pupils by the age of 7 years and 9 years. This is an improvement on the findings of the last inspection, when there was insufficient evidence of recording, presenting and evaluating the results of their own investigations. As a result, progress for the older pupils was only satisfactory overall. Previously, there had been an overuse of worksheets and not enough opportunities for pupils to apply the skills and knowledge they had learned in 'investigative contexts'. The curriculum has been much improved and is of good quality, with a clear development of the skills of scientific inquiry. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do, and boys and girls of all backgrounds and abilities are well supported and achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.

55. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Although it was possible to see only two science lessons being taught during the inspection, a scrutiny of work on display, of pupils' written work, and of teachers' planning, show that teachers capture pupils' enthusiasm by planning many challenging opportunities for pupils to learn through practical activities. Pupils are very enthusiastic about science, and say it is one of their most interesting lessons. They enjoy designing their own experiments and researching new ideas. Pupils of all ages were able to describe in detail how they carry out their own experiments and plan their own investigations. They understand the importance of recording their findings, and can analyse them and draw simple conclusions.

56. Leadership in science is good. However, the subject co-ordinator does not have enough opportunities to monitor the quality of teachers' planning, or their teaching and learning across the school. Analysis of pupils' work shows that it is marked regularly, and teachers give praise for good work and support those having difficulty. At present, teachers do not set pupils individual targets for improvement. However, the co-ordinator is introducing opportunities in Year 3 whereby pupils can evaluate their own success in the skills of scientific enquiry, as well as those in scientific knowledge and understanding, so they have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve. It will then be extended across the school if it is judged to be successful. Statutory tasks are now being analysed to identify any areas of weakness, a process which in turn informs the school development priorities.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

No firm judgement can be made about provision in ICT because of the limited range of available evidence.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The curriculum is of good quality.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used in other subjects to enrich learning.
- The school has very recently updated its computers so that progress can be sustained as more powerful software becomes available.

## **Commentary**

57. It was not possible to see the direct teaching of ICT during the period of the inspection. However, evidence from pupils' previously completed work shows that pupils are achieving satisfactory levels of attainment in the use of word-processors, databases, and the internet for research and communication.

58. Teachers ensure that all groups of pupils have equal access to suitably challenging activities. The curriculum is of good quality, and new software is significantly increasing the opportunities for individual pupils to practise new skills and to develop their competence in the use of information technology. However, the school has recognised the need to start updating the current computers so that pupils can use more powerful software as it becomes available. The school has recently purchased five new computers, and 'interwrite pads', and data projectors are about to be installed. This will ensure that pupils have improved access to computers to practise what they have learned and to carry out research, without interrupting their learning.

59. The co-ordinator has revised and updated the subject policy and development plan. However, she does not have enough opportunities to monitor the quality of teachers' planning, or of teaching and learning across the school.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

60. Scrutiny of teachers' planning, and of examples of previously completed work, shows that ICT is used well in other subjects to enrich learning. In literacy, for example, younger pupils develop simple word-processing and reading skills. Older pupils continue to develop their word-processing skill and are able to merge text, graphics and digital images. In numeracy, older pupils make extensive use of internet websites for mathematical games and challenges. Younger pupils develop their skills in counting, matching and sorting, and using simple databases and graphs. Pupils are able to access the internet for research in geography, history, and art, and older pupils can send and receive email from their 'email buddy' during the summer term.

### **HUMANITIES**

61. Work was sampled in **history and geography** but it is not possible to make an overall judgement on provision in either subject. Both subjects are taught imaginatively through themes, and pupils talk enthusiastically about the work they have done in both subjects. A good feature is the emphasis placed on practical activity, so that the work is meaningful to the children. The presentation of the pupils' work is of a high standard, and pupils have impressive folders of completed work.

62. In **history** pupils in Year 4 have studied the Romans, and the Angles and Saxons. Pupils have painted or created models of houses and Roman villas. They understand about Celtic designs and have increased their skills in literacy through texts on the Celts and the Romans. By making time lines, pupils begin to understand how time has passed. Overall, pupils are given good opportunities to consolidate their understanding of past times.

63. In **geography**, the work is linked with other subjects, such as history. The school has also been involved with a local project to develop the 'Community Nature Reserve'. Pupils have mapped the area and drawn plans of their ideas for the reserve. In Year 2, pupils have made maps of Meppershall and used computer programs to create road maps. Good comparisons have been made between Meppershall and other local areas like Stanton and with distant locations such as Namibia.

### **CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS**

64. In the case of art and design, design and technology, music and physical education, it is not possible to make a secure overall judgement on provision, including teaching and learning, and on standards. In addition to observing three lessons, inspectors talked to teachers about their work, spoke to pupils about what they had learned, and examined pupils' work.

65. It is evident from a scrutiny of work on display, and from discussion with pupils and an examination of completed work, that pupils experience an interesting **art and design** curriculum. Teachers plan effectively, using the nationally recommended guidelines, and make good links with other subjects.

66. Pupils work in a range of media to capture the images around them. They are particularly effective at using paints, for instance when depicting the movement of the ears of corn in a field after studying similar pictures by Van Gogh on the internet. Older pupils can identify the works of local and world-renowned artists and talk about their life and art in detail. Pupils are enthusiastic about art and say they really enjoy the subject. The high quality displays of pupils' work show they use a good range of media and artistic techniques. Most pupils are quick to locate their pictures and are keen to talk about how they used the media to achieve the effects they were seeking. This makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development and their appreciation of the expressive arts.

67. No firm judgement can be made about provision or the standards attained overall in **design and technology**. However, interviews with older pupils show they have a satisfactory understanding of the designing process, and understand how to successfully join a range of materials. They draw up their own designs and use a wide range of materials, such as fabrics, card, wood and foodstuffs. The curriculum meets the requirements of the National Curriculum, and staff work creatively to incorporate design and technology activities into whole-school projects.

68. **Music** is a strength of the school because staff are skilled and enthusiastic. The quality of pupils' singing is outstanding, and most of them are able to play an instrument. Only parts of lessons were observed, and no secure judgements can be made about overall provision. However, pupils sing beautifully in assemblies because the teachers have taught them very well. Collective spirits are uplifted by the quality of their voices, which are often accompanied by the school recorder group. All pupils learn to play an instrument of some kind. Most play the descant recorder whilst the most able pupils play violins, guitars and flutes, with improving skill. The great majority read music very well for their age, identifying notes on the treble stave. Pupils are thrilled by their new-found skills, and their self-esteem grows accordingly. Nearly all staff have a musical background and play an instrument themselves. Their enthusiasm is passed on to the pupils. They skilfully break down complex pieces of music so that pupils understand what they have to play. Planning indicates that the curriculum is of good quality, with many opportunities for pupils to perform in public.

69. No firm judgement can be made about the standards attained overall in **physical education**. However, the evidence submitted by the school shows that standards in swimming by Year 4 are above average, and all pupils benefit from sessions in the school's small swimming pool during the summer term. Pupils experience a varied curriculum, including aspects of movement, gymnastics, dance, swimming and team games. There is good equality of access and opportunity for all pupils, including those with SEN, who are well supported.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

Provision for PSHE and citizenship is very **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The caring and inclusive nature of the school is an important factor in the personal and social development of the pupils.

### **Commentary**

70. The school focuses well on PSHE. The adults' caring and very inclusive approach makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils also have a very good understanding of the difference between right and wrong, and a very clear appreciation of the impact their behaviour has on others. Pupils are encouraged to become mature and responsible

within the setting of the school community. For example, pupils are involved with planning a local community nature reserve and have planted trees. This fosters a sense of dignity, value and worth, as well as an appreciation of the environment. There is no school council, but pupils are given opportunities to express their views during class discussion.

71. Teachers use collective worship sessions to good effect to develop spirituality and promote good attitudes. There are also numerous opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility around the school to develop independence, which they do cheerfully and with pride. For example, pupils organise the hall for assembly and sit with their own friends from different classes. They do this very well, with the minimum of fuss or disruption. Others work and play alongside the youngest pupils, offering them help and support. All these activities enable the school to function as a well ordered community and promote very good social attitudes.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>	<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	3
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>	<b>2</b>
Attendance	2
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	4

*Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).*